

Supported By



WELCOME TO THE  
WORLD OF SLEEP





I'm  
not  
tired

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We all need a good night's sleep to be at our best. This guide has been produced to support parents and carers as we know that many of you may have difficulties getting your child/children to sleep but also struggle to get the amount of sleep that you need.

When we have children, we expect there to be some disrupted nights. Unfortunately for some families the sleepless nights can continue for months and even years. What we often don't realise is how common sleep issues are. What we do know is that sleep is extremely important to support children's development both physically and mentally. Establishing good sleep patterns can help children to meet their full potential.



There are many reasons why a child may experience sleep difficulties. Some of these may be out of your control such as pain management or trauma, others you can monitor and adjust such as screen usage and the bedroom environment.

In this book, we'll share our top advice to help you and your child get good quality, restorative sleep. But more importantly than that, we'll also tell you WHY you should do these things, explaining the science behind it all and how it impacts on other areas of wellbeing such as mental health. With this knowledge and understanding, you'll feel more confident about making any necessary changes.

**The good news is that using a  
behavioural approach to sleep can be  
HIGHLY EFFECTIVE.  
In an independent evaluation  
of our work, youngsters  
enjoyed an additional  
2.5 HOURS  
sleep per night after parents/  
carers followed our advice!**

more than  
**4 IN 10 CHILDREN**  
will have a sleep difficulty at some point.

This figure shoots up to more than  
**80%**  
when a child has a **Special Educational  
Need or Disability (SEND)**. If you are  
struggling with your child's sleep,  
**YOU ARE NOT ALONE!**

**EVERYONE**  
has issues with their sleep at some point,  
the trick is discovering what is  
**CAUSING THE DIFFICULTIES**  
and then putting in place the  
**APPROPRIATE STRATEGIES.**



CHAPTER 1:  
IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP



## WHY DOES SLEEP MATTER?

We all know that we feel better when we have had a good night's sleep, it helps our bodies to rest and repair. Sleep plays a vital role in our wellbeing. Here are some facts that you may not know:

- Sleep helps youngsters to grow, hormones are released during the night that support growth.
- Body tissue repairs during sleep – many top sports people have sleep coaches!
- A hormone is released during sleep that regulates appetite.
- A good night's sleep helps youngsters to concentrate better and to consolidate learning.
- Immune systems are stronger when we are well rested.
- We feel less anxious when we have had adequate sleep
- Beauty sleep is a real thing – research has proven that we look better after a good kip!

**Hyperactivity is one of the most common symptoms of sleep deprivation that The Sleep Charity sees in youngsters.**

**If your child appears not to need much sleep,**

**DO NOT DESPAIR,**  
the strategies we discuss may still help.





Families often report that their child just does not need a lot of sleep and is always 'on the go'. They also tell us that they have tried everything and nothing works.

We completely understand! It is helpful to know that hyperactivity can be a symptom of sleep deprivation, so please do not give up hope of getting a good night's sleep.



## YOUR SLEEP

When your child has sleep issues, it impacts negatively on your sleep. Lack of sleep will make it harder to concentrate and remember important things. During sleep your brain is processing all the information you've received throughout the day, forming memories and keeping it for later. If you drive and are tired your reaction times are slower, increasing the risk of an accident.

**One study has shown that  
SLEEP DEPRIVATION  
has a bigger impact on reaction times  
while driving than alcohol consumption  
– it is vitally important to address  
the sleep issues in your life.**

[https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/  
articles/10.1186/s12889-020-09095-5](https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-09095-5)

Lack of sleep can also make it difficult for you to work, impacting on your finances. Relationship issues are common too when families are sleep deprived.

Our mood can be lowered when exhausted and there are close links with sleep deprivation and depression. You may find that you are more irritable and anxious, making decisions can be a challenge. Dealing with a child who is up during the night can really test your patience and you may be snappier than usual or may remove boundaries you have put in place to pacify them – this is all normal and because you are worn out.

Making changes to your child's sleep can seem too difficult when you are exhausted. We do understand! The key is to understand why the sleep issues are occurring and identify appropriate strategies to try. You can try one thing at a time, as and when you feel able to implement a change. If you try to do too much at once it can feel too hard and you may give up. Be kind to yourself. Remember sleep deprivation is used as a form of torture because it is highly effective!



## WHERE TO BEGIN?

You may feel overwhelmed by sleep issues and don't know where to begin. Or you may believe you have tried everything and there is no point continuing to read this guide. Our aim is to empower you with sleep information and education so that you can identify strategies that will help you to cope better. Improving your child's sleep will in turn improve your sleep. We will guide you through the science behind sleep and help you to identify why your child may have sleep issues so that you can then decide what action to take to improve your family's life.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T MAKE CHANGES?

Sleep issues very rarely resolve without some form of intervention. The likelihood is that if you don't make some changes they could continue for a long period of time (even into adulthood) or even worsen. Changing sleep habits is hard, it takes determination, and you must be absolutely consistent in your approach. We will explore with you the kind of changes you could consider making that will have a positive impact.

Remember sleep is essential to your physical, emotional and mental wellbeing and for that of your child – yet it often goes unrecognised.

**It has even been said that  
you could survive for  
THREE TIMES  
as long without food as one  
could without sleep!**



<https://www.sleepio.com/articles/sleep-science/how-long-can-you-go-without-sleep/>

# CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING SLEEP



It's important to understand a little about the science of sleep so that you can begin to identify why your child may have some difficulties. Firstly, you should remind yourself that we are all individuals and our sleep needs are also very personal to us. Try not to compare your child's sleep needs to that of other children. The key to a good night's sleep is working out their individual needs and putting strategies in place to meet these effectively.

First for the bad news: you cannot control sleep. So, when you tell your child to 'just go to sleep' they literally can't! Think about it another way if I ordered you go to sleep right now and your reward would be £1million could you? It would be highly unlikely, even though you would love the money and you are probably feeling somewhat tired. The good news is that there are things that **CAN** be controlled that will help your child to fall asleep more easily – more about these later!



## STAGES OF SLEEP

There are four stages of sleep that everyone goes through several times each night. These are made up of two types of sleep: REM sleep and Non-REM sleep.

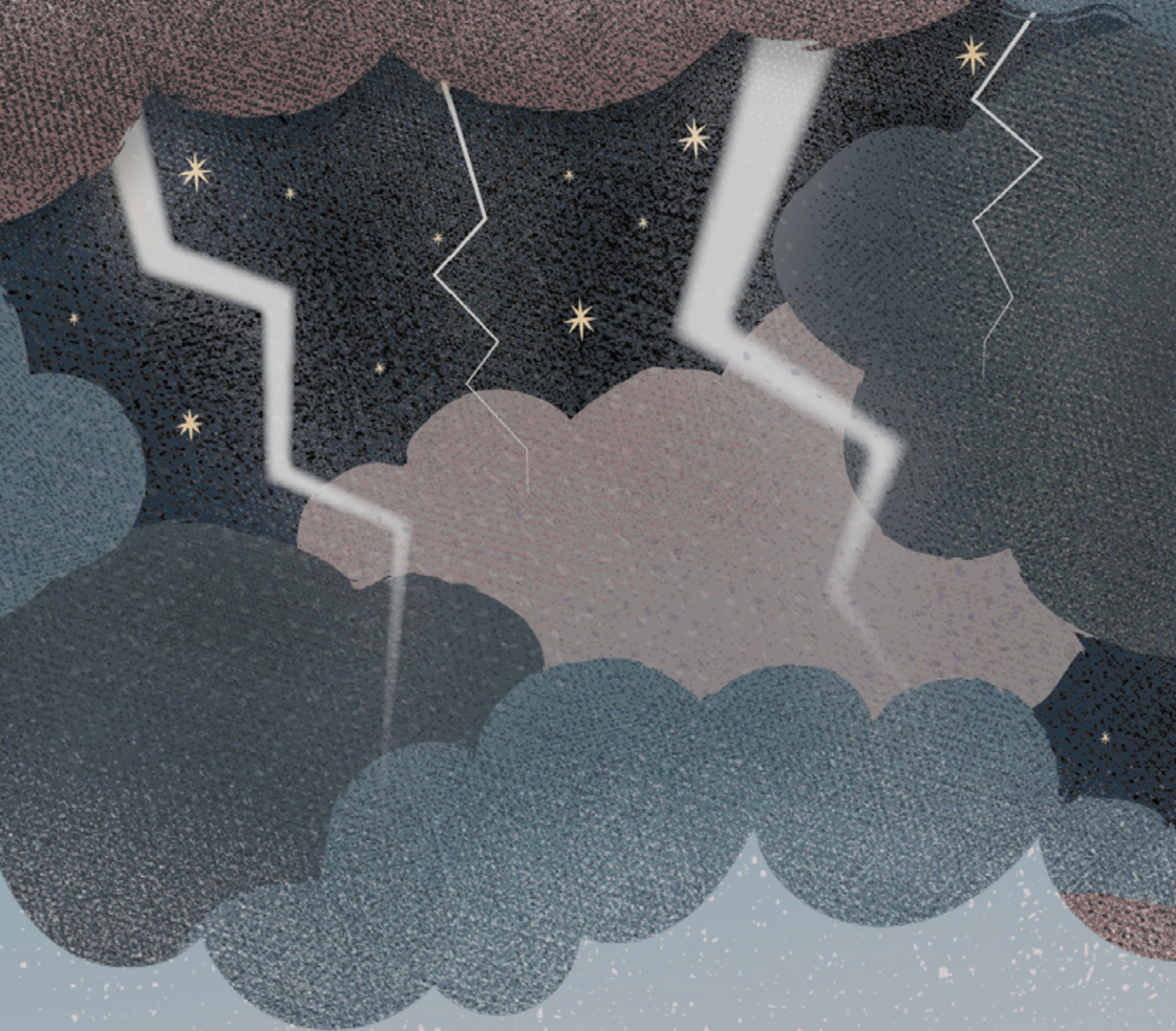
**Non-REM** sleep is made up of three stages. This is the restful and restorative sleep where your body is being repaired. Non-REM sleep lowers muscle tone, body temperature, heart rate and blood pressure.

**Stage N1** is where you experience light sleep, when you are nodding off but can be easily woken by a slight sound or movement. If you stay with your child until they nod off and then attempt to leave too early, they will wake up during this stage.

**Stage N2** is a deeper sleep, you are still aware of your surroundings, but if left undisturbed you will continue to Stage N3.

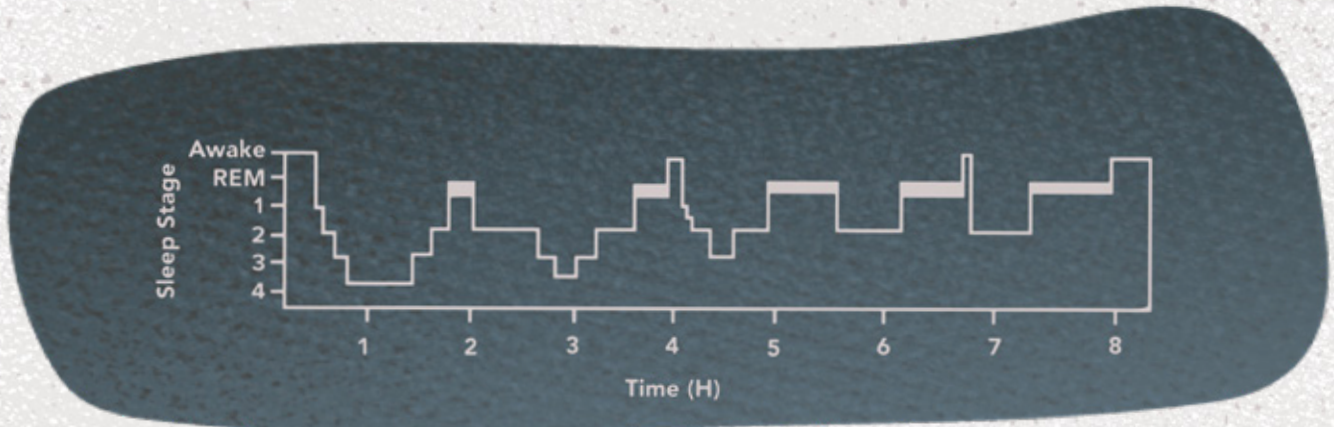
**Stage N3** (slow wave sleep) is when you are in a deep sleep and may find it difficult to awaken. This is the stage where you can carry young children to bed and they won't wake up.

**REM** (rapid eye movement) sleep is where the body switches off and the brain receives extra blood and processes the day's events. This sleep consolidates learning and helps develop social and emotional abilities. In REM sleep you dream and during this period of sleep your body is deeply relaxed.



**Some children may experience  
NIGHT TERRORS  
or SLEEP WALKING  
as they move through different stages  
of sleep. These usually happen in the  
early part of the night, you can find  
out more about these in Chapter 3.**

The diagram below is called a hypnogram and shows the different stages of sleep that we have discussed. When we move between stages, we experience what we call a 'partial waking'. Often, we are not aware of these and roll over, continuing to snooze. If anything has changed however... that's when we wake up!



Children who have not learned to self-settle may wake fully at these points too. For example if your child needs you to be with them at the start of the night so that they can fall asleep, when they partially awake they are much more likely to then fully awake because you have disappeared. You have become their sleep association; they need you there to get back to sleep.

Moving a child into a different environment can also cause them to fully awaken during the night. For example, if a child goes to sleep in the car, or downstairs and you carry them to bed asleep, when there is a partial waking they are more likely to completely wake up, just as you would if you found that you had been transported to another room during the night!



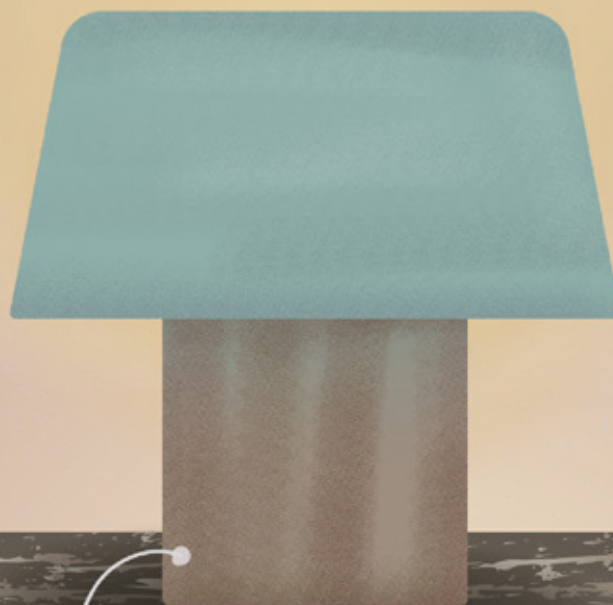


## DID YOU KNOW THAT...

**your child is more likely to wake if conditions have changed while they have been asleep? If they fall asleep with the landing light on and you switch it off when you go to bed this may trigger a waking.**

**Or if you have invested in a product that provides light/sound and switches off, this too could cause them to wake.**

**The key thing to learn from this is that conditions should be consistent all the way through the night for you to reduce your chances of them waking once they have nodded off.**



## THE IMPORTANCE OF LIGHT AND DARK

We all have an internal body clock that runs roughly on a 24-hour cycle, called the circadian rhythm. Light and darkness helps to regulate our body clock so that we go to sleep and wake up on the same schedule. Darkness helps us to produce the hormone 'melatonin' which makes us feel sleepy at bedtime. Exposure to natural daylight helps us to suppress melatonin and to feel more awake. Sometimes children's body clocks can go off track, for example when changing the clocks from winter time to summer time.



The body clock can run slightly longer than 24-hours in some people (those who go to bed early and wake too early), and in others slightly less (people who go to bed late and sleep well into the morning). To some extent whether you are a night owl or a lark is genetically programmed, youngsters who are night owls are alert in the evening and like having a lie in whereas, larks are up early and prefer an early night.

If you are a parent of a teen, it is vital to know that they are biologically more likely to produce the sleep hormone, melatonin, later at night meaning they don't feel sleepy until the early hours. For a period of time this shifts their natural circadian rhythm making it out of sync. This means they may struggle with falling asleep at an appropriate hour, need lengthy lie-ins at the weekend and find it harder to wake up in the morning.

**You can visit [www.teensleephub.org.uk](http://www.teensleephub.org.uk) and read our Teen Sleep eBook for more specialist advice around teen sleep.**

## ARE YOU A NIGHT OWL OR A LARK?

**CLICK HERE TO  
TAKE THE QUIZ**



In addition to the circadian rhythm, sleep is also regulated by the sleep/wake homeostasis. This tells you when you are tired and need to rest. You build up a need for sleep during the day and then when bedtime comes you are tired and ready to rest.



Think of it like a battery. In the morning, after a good night's sleep, your battery is fully charged. As the day goes on your battery depletes. If you have a nap that will charge it up a little more. The timing and duration of naps are important. Parents tend to knock off naps when they have a poor sleeper, naps however are vital for children in the early years, they just need to be well timed. It is in fact more difficult to get a sleep deprived child to sleep at night-time than a well-rested child!

Having a consistent routine including a regular sleep/wake time can help to support your child's circadian rhythm.

Here are a few top tips:

- Darken the environment in the hour before bed to support your child to nod off more easily
- Avoid screens in the hour before bed too
- Open the curtains first on waking and let the light flood in
- Try to factor in 30 minutes outside each morning if possible



**You only need  
4 MINUTES  
of daylight to stop producing melatonin.  
Close the curtains in summertime in the  
evening to create a darkened environment.**

### HOW MUCH SLEEP SHOULD MY CHILD BE HAVING?

As we have already said, every child is an individual and sleep needs can vary. The following information is from a book by Lyn Quine and gives an approximate guide. The most important thing is to note whether your child is showing signs of sleep deprivation when trying to work out their ideal number of hours snoozing.

### AVERAGE HOURS OF SLEEP NEEDED

AGE	AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS NEEDED	
	DAYTIME	NIGHTTIME
1 WEEK	8	8½
4 WEEKS	6¾	8¾
3 MONTHS	5	10
6 MONTHS	4	10
9 MONTHS	2¾	11¼
12 MONTHS	2½	11½
2 YEARS	1¼	11¾
3 YEARS	1	11
4 YEARS	-	11½
5 YEARS	-	11
6 YEARS	-	10¾

AGE	AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS NEEDED	
	DAYTIME	NIGHTTIME
7 YEARS	-	10½
8 YEARS	-	10¼
9 YEARS	-	10
10 YEARS	-	9¾
11 YEARS	-	9½
12 YEARS	-	9½
13 YEARS	-	9¼
14 YEARS	-	9
15 YEARS	-	8¾
16 YEARS	-	8½

## SLEEP DIARIES:

If you are worried about your child's sleep, keeping a sleep diary may be helpful. Sleep diaries can help you to find reasons why your child is not sleeping. It is important that you log everything for at least two weeks to see if any patterns emerge.

You can also share the sleep diary with any professionals that are involved with your child such as your Health Visitor, GP or Family Support Worker.



## TOP TIPS FOR KEEPING A SLEEP DIARY:

- Always keep it by your bed and record any activity immediately or you are likely to forget
- If your child sleeps elsewhere such as at a grandparent's or with a non-resident parent, ask them to keep the diary too. Mark on the diary which these nights are so that it is clear when they were in a different sleep environment
- Complete the diary accurately, record every time they wake up
- If you need more space, you can photocopy the diary to enlarge it
- Try to keep the diary at a time when life is typical, avoid holidays such as Christmas time

**You can create your own  
SLEEP DIARY  
and make it as creative as you'd like, or  
[download our pre-made sleep diary](#)**

## WHAT DO THE RESULTS MEAN?

When you have completed the diary for two weeks, it is time to review the information for any patterns. Important things to note are:

- The length of time it takes your child to nod off at the start of the night. If it is more than 30 minutes this needs to be a focus and may indicate that they need a slightly later bedtime.
- Once your child is asleep do they wake during the night? If so can you identify a reason for this? Has anything changed since they went to bed? Think about the light, noise, whether you usually stay with them.

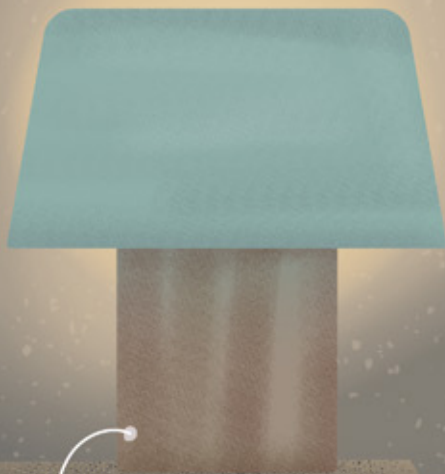
- Daytime naps and whether they are appropriate for their age and if they are too early or late. Too early could mean they are sleep deprived and need more night time sleep. If they have a nap too late in the day, it can impact on their sleep drive and they may not be tired when it comes to their bedtime.
- The time your child wakes in the morning should be consistent throughout the week, including weekends, to strengthen their circadian rhythm. Likewise, the time your child falls to sleep should be the same, routine is key when it comes to sleep and keeping the body clock on track.
- The amount of sleep your child is getting each night can now be calculated using the diaries.
- Sharing this information with a professional can be helpful, sometimes it is hard to identify sleep issues. If you are worried you should get support as soon as possible.



Now that you have some of the basics around sleep physiology, we are going to move on to look at common reasons that children experience sleep issues.



# CHAPTER 3: CAUSES OF SLEEP ISSUES



There is always a reason for sleep issues, the key to overcoming them is finding the reason and then applying the appropriate strategy. The strategy also needs to be implemented consistently over a period of several weeks to be effective. The bad news is that sleep issues often get worse before they get better as children resist new strategies. This is the key point where you need to remain consistent in your approach.

A word of warning, there can be **MANY** reasons a child has sleep issues, taking time to consider these is important otherwise you will simply choose strategies that aren't useful and feel frustrated that the issue hasn't improved.

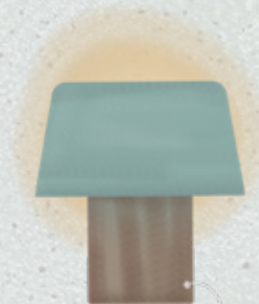


Here are the most common problems that we encounter for you to consider:

## SLEEP ASSOCIATIONS

Most of us have sleep associations – things we need in place to have a great night's sleep. For example some people need a certain pillow, or background noise playing or covering up even if it is very warm.

Children also have sleep associations and if these can't be maintained throughout the night, they are likely to wake up. Common ones that we see include; needing a parent next to them to fall asleep, using a dummy, having a landing light on, the television/lullaby show playing, and there are many more!



If a sleep association is not in place consistently throughout the night, your child is more likely to wake after a sleep cycle. For example, if a lullaby show turns off after 30 minutes, when your child partially awakes the sound and light conditions have changed which may trigger them to fully awaken. They will find it easier to nod off if you put the lullaby show back on. The ideal solution is to teach them to sleep without this playing so that they don't awaken during the night. It is a good idea to think carefully about how they fall asleep and whether there are any sleep associations involved that aren't being maintained.

## LACK OF ROUTINE

Is there a routine in place? Many families give up on routines because they believe they don't work. But did you know that doing the same thing at the same time each night helps to strengthen the circadian rhythm?

## ANXIETY AND WORRIES

Separation anxiety can be a huge issue for little ones causing them to feel upset at bedtime. As children get older it may be that they worry about school, exams, or relationships. Sleep deprivation can also increase anxiety making it more difficult to nod off at night-time.

## FOOD AND DRINK

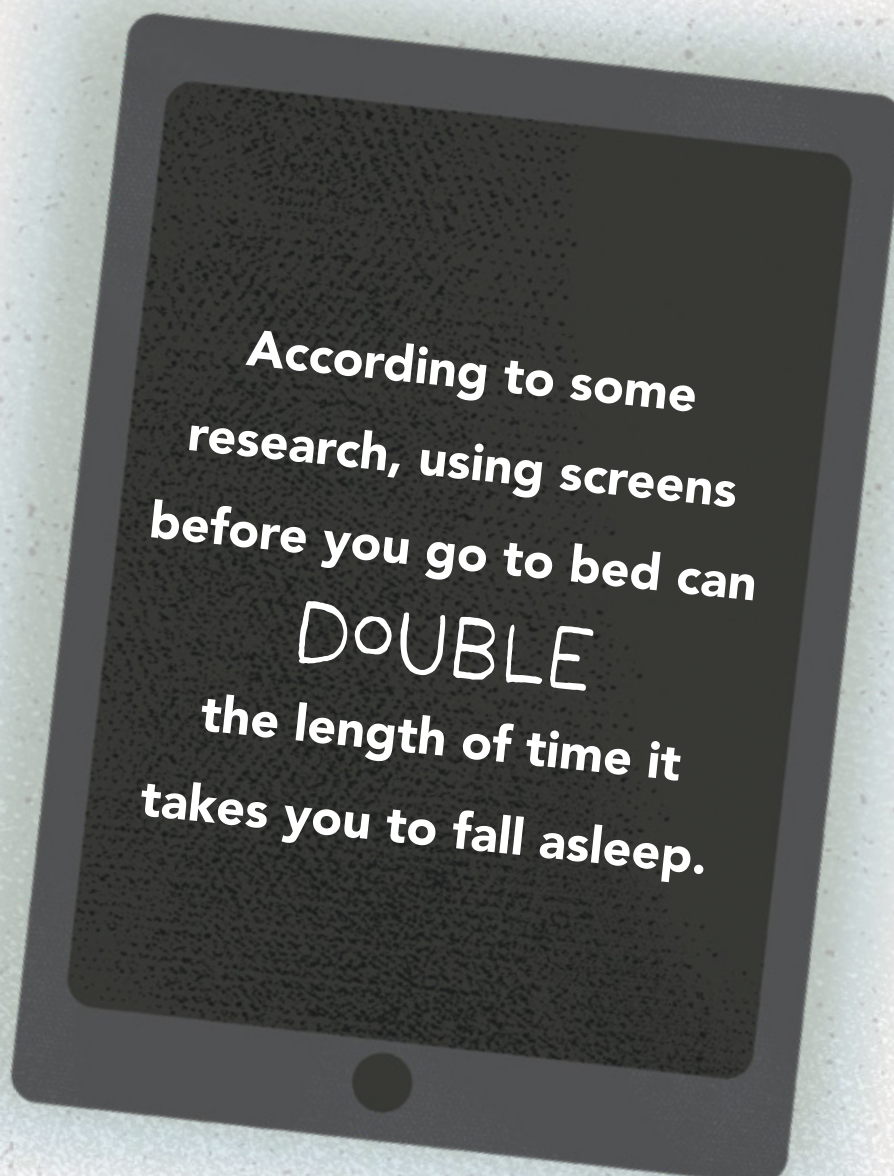
Did you know your diet may impact on your night-time sleep? Sometimes we give our children a sugar/caffeine rush before bed without even realising it – hot chocolate and a biscuit is a terrible sleep combination! We have some great sleepy food ideas coming up in the next chapter.



## SCREEN TIME

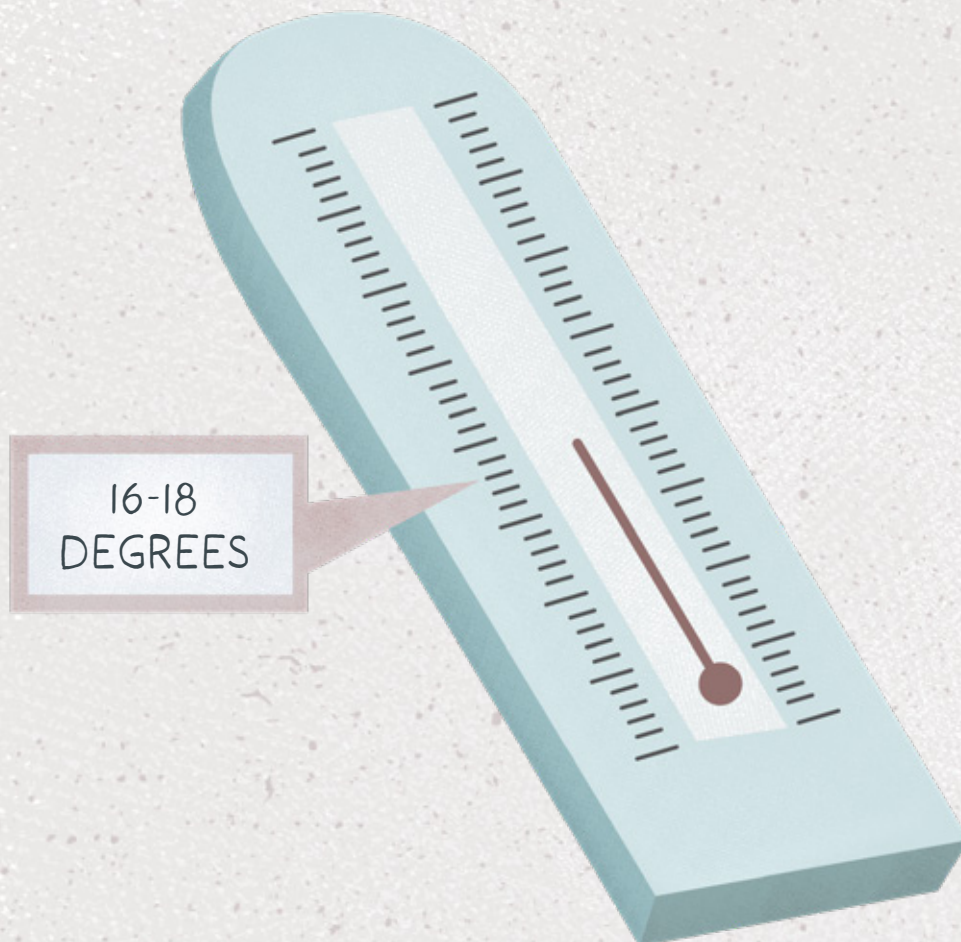
It may not go down well in your household but using screens such as televisions, game consoles and mobile phones is not advisable in the hour leading up to bedtime.

The blue light that screens give off is similar to sunlight and sends a signal to the brain to stop producing melatonin. You may consider using a blue light filter screen to help but it's important to remember that we advise screen avoidance right before bedtime (not just because of the blue light but because the screen and content are usually visually stimulating).



## ROOM TEMPERATURE

If your child is too hot or too cold, it will impact on their sleep. We often tend to make the sleeping environment warmer than needed, thinking this might help with sleep when in fact a cooler room will aid better sleep. Ideally the room should be around 16-18 degrees.



## NOISE

Some children are particularly noise sensitive, it may be that the clicking on and off of the heating for example is enough to wake them. White noise can work well to mask out background noise. You can buy white noise machines that can be left on throughout the night.

## LIGHT

Consider whether the lighting in the room changes during the night. If your child is used to going to sleep in complete darkness.



it may be that you need to invest in

HEAVY LINED  
CURTAINS

or

BLACKOUT BLINDS

if they begin to wake  
early in the summer.



## OVER STIMULATING BEDROOMS

We have seen some amazing bedrooms over the years, with disco lights, murals on the wall and piled high with toys –

whilst these look fantastic, they

ARE NOT IDEAL FOR A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.

Ideally the bedroom should be screen free, decorated in calming neutral colours and anything that may be more appealing than nodding off should be covered over or put away.



## PAIN/MEDICATION

If your child is in pain it will impact on their sleep, and you should seek advice from a medical professional if you are concerned. It is also worth checking if any medication that they are taking may be impacting on their sleep.

## NIGHTMARES/NIGHT TERRORS

These often get confused but are very different. A nightmare is a frightening dream, and a child will wake up fully and take comfort from you. It is important to give them reassurance as they can be extremely scary. In younger children, they can't always distinguish between what is real and what isn't so don't be quick to say it isn't real. However don't reinforce the nightmare – there is no need to look under beds for monsters as they don't exist remember!

**A night terror usually happens at the start of the night and the child may APPEAR TO BE AWAKE but is still asleep.**



As the name suggests, they look terrified. They will not take comfort from you as they are still asleep. You need to wait until the terror passes, they will then usually continue sleeping. They can be linked with sleep deprivation and increased temperatures, so try to keep the room cool.

If you are worried about night terrors do seek medical advice.



## CHILDREN WITH SEND

Research shows that youngsters with a SEND are more likely to have a sleep issue. There can be many reasons for this including those that we have already covered. In addition, some research suggests that youngsters with a diagnosis of Autism may not produce enough melatonin.

There is also research suggesting that children with ADHD may release melatonin later at night. Medication used to treat ADHD can also have a negative impact on sleep if administered too late in the day. The good news is that these youngsters can also respond positively to using a behavioural approach to sleep and the strategies that we suggest should be tried before resorting to sleep medication.

Bedtime resistance is a common issue with some youngsters finding it difficult to understand and follow a routine. They may resist ending their favourite activities and bedtime can quickly turn into battle time.

Visual and hearing impairments can both make complete darkness extremely disorientating. Other youngsters may have sensory processing difficulties which also impacts on their sleep. They may for example be particularly noise, touch or light sensitive.

Using a behavioural approach for these children is recommended as the first line of intervention and therefore the strategies that we cover can still be applied. You should however ensure your child's Paediatrician is aware of the sleep difficulties to rule out any underlying medical sleep disorders.

**In this chapter we have covered some of the more common factors that could be contributing to your child's sleep issues, but there are others too.**

**Keeping a sleep diary will help identify any patterns so that you can**

**IDENTIFY THE  
RIGHT ACTION.**

# CHAPTER 4: SLEEP STRATEGIES



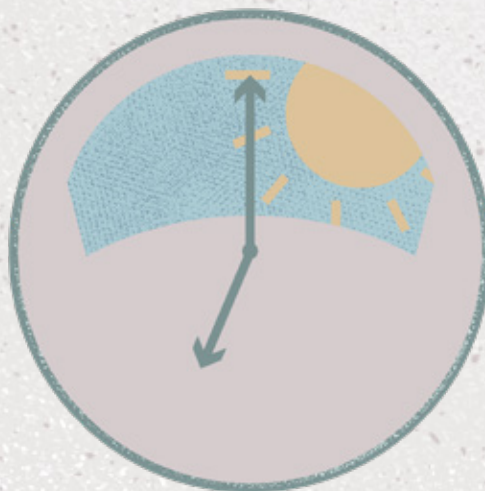
Now that you understand the basics of sleep and the kind of things that contribute to sleep issues, we will consider ideas that you can try at home. This is sometimes referred to as 'sleep hygiene'.

## ROUTINE IS ESSENTIAL

Everyone benefits from having a routine in the run up to bedtime – especially parents/carers! For something to become routine it needs to be repeated a number of times and the same thing to be done at the same time each day. It can help your child to understand what to expect.

## HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU TO ESTABLISH A GOOD ROUTINE FOR YOUR CHILD:

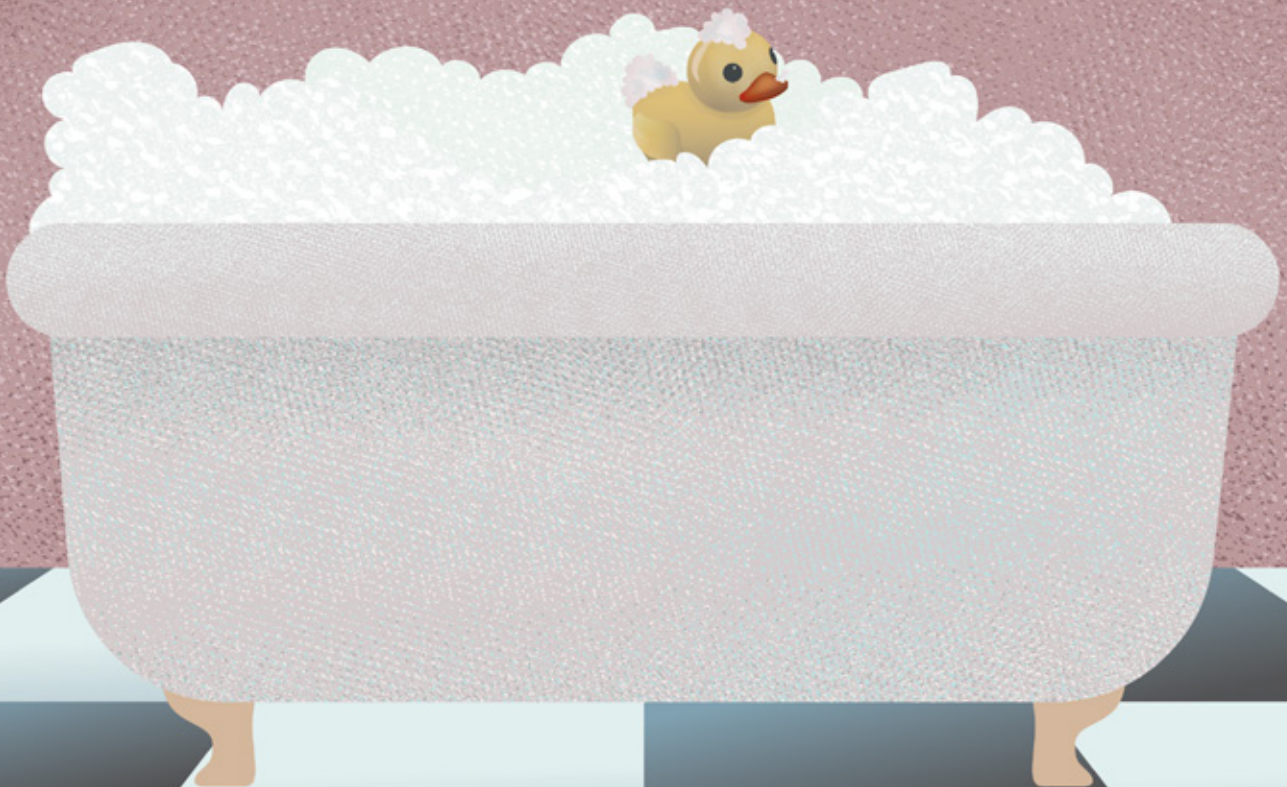
The bedtime routine should begin an hour before 'sleep time'. Use the sleep diary to find the average time that your child falls to sleep and use that as a starting point. For example, if they fall to sleep at 9.30pm, begin the bedtime routine at 8.30pm with the aim being to get them into bed asleep for 9.30pm. Once they achieve this successfully for 3 nights, shift the whole routine forward by 15 minutes, so the routine begins at 8.15pm and sleep time becomes 9.15pm until you get to a bedtime that is suitable.



- Remember to wake your child up at the same time each morning too, even on weekends!
- Turn off all screens in the hour before bed. Remember what we said earlier about how the blue light reduces the sleepy hormone, melatonin
- Choose calming things to do, anything that uses fine motor skills can be very relaxing such as jigsaws, colouring in and craft activities
- Consider introducing supper time. Slow releasing carbohydrates are great for keeping little tummies full. Dairy products are also very calming at night time. Avoid anything sugar loaded or containing caffeine
- Dim the lights and close the curtains during this time to help the body to produce melatonin
- Try to do the same thing at the same time each night this will help the body prepare for relaxation and sleep for example, pyjamas on, tooth brushing, toilet



If your child likes  
**HAVING A BATH**  
then schedule this in at least half an  
hour before 'sleep time'. This will  
increase their body temperature, it is  
the drop in body temperature following  
the bath that can help them to  
**FALL ASLEEP MORE EASILY**

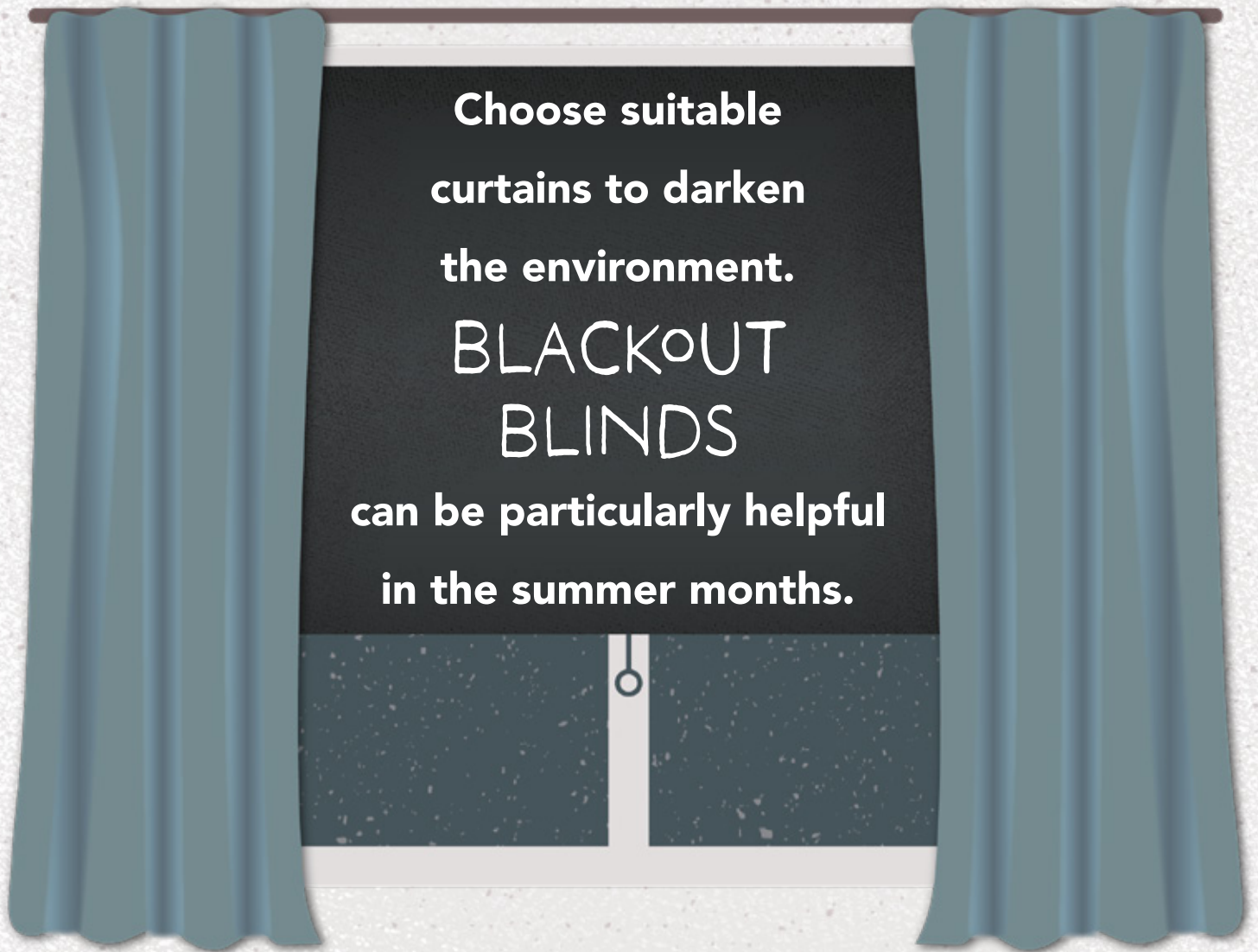


## IDEAL BEDROOM ENVIRONMENT

A restful bedroom environment is important when addressing sleep. We all fall to sleep more easily when we are in a comfortable, safe and secure setting.

**It's now time to think about your child's sleeping environment and to see if there are any changes you can make:**

An ideal sleeping space needs to be free of distractions, quiet, dark, clutter free and cool. Invest in a thermometer to check the temperature is consistently between 16 and 18 degrees.



If your child needs some light help them to fall asleep, that's fine. Just make sure it can be safely left on all night.



A quiet room can encourage better sleep. Check what noises can be heard from your child's room. White noise machines can mask background noise which can also be useful especially if there are external environmental sounds you can't control such as busy roads, railways or noisy neighbours.

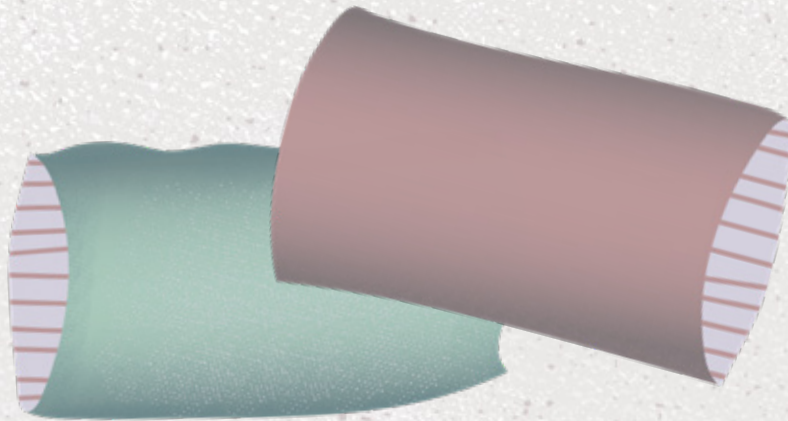
Think about the decor in the room. A room with brightly coloured walls won't help your child to get a good night's sleep. Instead, you should try opting for more neutral colours. Are there any posters that may appear to be frightening when the lights are off?

It is important to consider whether your child's bed is comfortable. The age at which a child is ready to move out of a cot into a bed varies but is generally between 18 months and three years. A cot bed or smaller-scale starter bed may help initially to make the transition to a single bed. Parents should aim to change the child's bed and/or mattress at significant growth periods.

This may require several bed changes - for example a teenager who's suddenly shot up to 6ft plus needs a bed that will enable their feet to stay on the mattress and not hang over the end! The right mattress is vital as it must provide the correct support for growing bones and muscles. That means sufficient support to hold the spine in correct alignment and sufficient comfort layers to cradle the body's contours.



Consider whether the pillows need changing, comfort is key when it comes to sleep.



Eliminate electronic devices from the bedroom. If this isn't possible, try to separate areas of the bedroom for sleep and play. It's important that children and teens know that the bed is a place for rest. If you have children sharing a bedroom, consider how you can adjust the environment to suit both their needs. As children get older you can involve them in planning their bedroom design so that they have ownership of it.


## EXERCISE

Exercise can help your child to sleep but not if carried out too close to bedtime. Don't try to wear them out before bed as it can have the opposite effect, with the release of adrenaline and feel good endorphins! Exercise doesn't always mean sporting activities, playing outside or going for a walk can be helpful.

**Aim for your child to get some exercise  
each day but best avoided in the  
TWO TO THREE HOURS  
before bed.**

## SUPPER TIME SNACKS

Caffeine can influence how long it takes you to fall asleep, how long you sleep for, and the quality of your sleep. Caffeine is also hidden in lots of products that we might associate with bedtime, such as hot chocolate. It's best to avoid them in the evening before bed.



**Did you know, the half-  
life of caffeine is  
AROUND 5 HOURS,  
that means it take five  
hours for just half of the  
caffeine you have consumed  
to leave the body!**

Check the sugar content of supper time snacks such as cereals too and remember even fruit has natural sugars in so should be consumed in moderation.

We've talked about the need to avoid caffeine and sweet treats too close to bedtime but adding in a small evening snack of certain foods can really help aid sleep.



**Snacks like**  
LOW SUGAR  
CEREAL, MILK,  
BANANA,  
CHERRIES AND  
EVEN CHEESE  
**are all good choices.**



**During the hour before bed,  
stick to drinking milk or water**



Sleepy foods consist of almonds, bananas, oatmeal, cherries, sugar free cereal and turkey (we now have a genuine excuse for that post-Christmas dinner nap!) as well as anything dairy – it's a myth that cheese gives you nightmares! These foods either contain natural melatonin, or tryptophan, an amino acid that promotes sleep. It is worth noting more research needs to be done around this area.



## BAD DREAMS, BLAME THE CHEESE!

**This is a myth thought to have come from the classic Dickens story *A Christmas Carol*, where Scrooge blames seeing the three ghosts on eating a mouldy piece of cheese**

Hunger can be a cause of early waking so adding a supper time snack into the routine can be helpful for some children. Some youngsters rely on a bottle or breast to fall asleep – we are not talking about infants here, but older children who nutritionally do not need a night-time feed. Feeding babies during the night is important and it is biologically typical and healthy for them to wake in the night.

Sleep associations can however occur with feeding to sleep in older children, they may waken during the night and only nod back off if fed. If this is an issue you should discuss with your Health Visitor for advice around the number of feeds needed and gradually reducing these in line with your child's nutritional needs.

## ANXIETY

Many children get anxious at bedtime, separation anxiety can be particularly distressing for both parent and child. Make sure you offer your child lots of reassurance, you could give them a special item to look after for you overnight, this may help them to understand that you are going to return. Photographs of family members in the bedroom may give some children comfort too.

Youngsters may be fearful of sleep. Adults often use language around 'going to sleep' when discussing death. For example the pet hamster has 'gone to sleep'. Some children may find it helpful to have a visual timetable, showing a picture of them going to bed, one of them asleep and another of them waking up so that they can be reassured by the full cycle.

If a child is fearful of the dark you can introduce a softly glowing night light that can be safely left on all night. You may also wish to read stories to normalise this such as 'The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark' by Jill Tomlinson.



Older children may find it helpful to introduced to some simple relaxation and mindfulness techniques such as these:

## MINDFULNESS

- Notice 5 things you can see
- Notice 4 things you can feel
- Notice 3 things you can hear
- Notice 2 things you can smell
- Notice 1 thing you can taste



**If you are concerned about your child's anxiety levels, you should always discuss this with a professional.**

## BREATHING

In bed encourage your child to focus on their breath going in and out. Experience each breath and pay attention to how this makes them feel. You could encourage them to try the 7/11 breathing exercise. This is where you breathe in deeply whilst counting to 7, then breathe out slowly to the count of 11. Repeating this for a few minutes can help you feel calm and relaxed and can help you avoid being consumed by negative thoughts. This can also be a very useful technique that you can try if you feel stressed whilst dealing with your child during the night.

## NEEDING A PARENT TO FALL ASLEEP

Some families make the choice to co-sleep, which if done safely is fine.

Other families find they co-sleep out of necessity rather than choice and want support to stop this.

If your child needs you to settle at the start of the night, you may want to try the gradual retreat method to encourage them to settle without you.

The idea is that you gradually move yourself a little further away from them every 3 nights once they are settling well. If you currently lay in bed with them as they fall asleep you could try sitting by the side of the bed. If they engage in conversation tell them 'it's night time, go to sleep'.



**You must remember that if they  
wake in the night you  
will have to  
REPEAT THIS PROCESS  
as they currently can't  
settle without you there – remember  
the sleep associations?**

**Well...you are more than likely one of them!**



## STARTING A SLEEP PLAN

It is a good idea to identify two weeks that you can dedicate to implementing your sleep plan. It is best to avoid times when life may be disrupted due to holidays or for older youngsters exams. You need to commit to carrying out the plan consistently and expect that sleep patterns may get worse before they get better as your child resists the new routine.

**Some families take leave from work, others**

**GET SUPPORT**

**from family members to give**

**them the opportunity to**

**CATCH UP ON REST**

**DURING THE DAY.**

**Consider how you will manage during this**

**period and how many changes you**

**realistically have the capacity to make at**

**once.**

## NOT APPEARING TO BE TIRED

If a child hasn't built up enough of a sleep drive they will not be able to fall asleep at night. Use sleep diaries to check how much sleep they are getting and whether sleep time needs to be adjusted. Sometimes parents are simply putting children to bed far too early and having unrealistic expectations of the amount of sleep that is needed.

You should also check nap times and that they are well scheduled in youngsters who still need them. A nap too late in the day will impact on bedtime.

In addition to this, check for signs of sleep deprivation. It could be that your child appears active at night time but this is actually a symptom of chronic sleep deprivation. Are they able to wake easily in the morning? Are they concentrating and attentive during the day? Do they yawn, rub their eyes?



## MAKING BEDTIME POSITIVE

Bedtime often becomes the part of the day that families dread. It is key that bedtime becomes positive again for you and your child. Here are some simple tips to help to promote a more enjoyable bedtime in your home:

- Point out the things that are going well during the routine and praise your child for them such as 'I love the way you put your toys away, well done!' Try to ignore the negatives where possible.
- Give rewards that motivate your child such as a sticker or a point on a reward chart. Never take these away or put negatives such as a sad face on the chart.
- Select activities to carry out in the routine that you know will keep your child engaged. You could think about their favourite TV characters and search for jigsaws or download colouring sheets online featuring them.
- Give your child a choice of 2 activities so that they feel they still have some control.
- End the day positively by sharing 5 happy things that have taken place.

We are not saying it is going to be easy, because we know how challenging changing sleep patterns can be, but these tips will hopefully help you and your child to get a better night's sleep.





# CHAPTER 5: WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP



It's important to inform a healthcare practitioner if you are worried about your child's sleep. This is particularly important if you notice any unusual movements during sleep or breathing patterns. You could mention this to your GP or Health Visitor. Some children may need referring to a sleep clinic within a local hospital if medical issues are suspected to be causing the problems. Keeping a sleep diary to show them could be useful too.

You should also mention the sleep issues to your child's education setting as it will no doubt be impacting on their daytime behaviour.

Here are a range of resources that you may find useful too:

#### TEEN SLEEP HUB

provides a range of information and advice for teenagers

[www.teensleephub.org.uk](http://www.teensleephub.org.uk)

#### NATIONAL SLEEP HELPLINE

0330 353 0541

run by The Sleep Charity, it's opening hours and more information can be found here

<https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/national-sleep-helpline/>



**03303 530 541**

Monday, Tuesday & Thursday 7pm - 9pm  
Monday & Wednesday 9am - 11am

ALLERGY UK  
[www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)  
Helpline: 0132 261 9898

ANNA FREUD  
<https://www.annafreud.org/>  
AFC Crisis Messenger  
Text AFC to 85258

ANXIETY UK  
<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/get-help/anxiety-uk-national-infoline-service/>  
Helpline: 03444 775 774

ASTHMA & LUNG UK  
[www.asthma.org.uk](http://www.asthma.org.uk)  
Helpline: 0300 222 5800

MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION  
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

NATIONAL BULLYING HELPLINE  
<https://www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/>

NATIONAL ECZEMA SOCIETY  
[www.eczema.org](http://www.eczema.org)  
Helpline: 0800 089 1122

SAMARITANS  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)  
Tel: 116 123

BED ADVICE UK  
[www.bedadvice.co.uk](http://www.bedadvice.co.uk)

CALM  
[www.calm.com](http://www.calm.com)

ERIC, THE CHILDREN'S BOWEL & BLADDER CHARITY  
[www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk)  
Helpline: 0808 169 9949

HEADSPACE  
[www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com)

MIND  
<https://www.mind.org.uk/>  
Tel: 0300 123 3393

SUPPORTLINE  
<https://www.supportline.org.uk/>  
Helpline number: 0170 876 5200

THE LULLABY TRUST  
[www.lullabytrust.org.uk](http://www.lullabytrust.org.uk)  
Advice Line: 0808 802 6869

YOUNG MINDS  
[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)  
Crisis messenger service  
Text YM to 85258

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NIGHT’S SLEEP.”

- Laura York, Community Charity Manager, Dunelm



Reviewed by our Advisory Board member, Dr Ruth Kingshott



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